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ABSTRACT

Journalism and mass communication educators should be involved in development of a single course on media and society designed for general education that could be more easily integrated into the core of smaller liberal arts colleges than in their university counterparts. Media education in Britain has a long history, while media literacy in the United States remains housed in high school English departments. In the wake of rampant criticism of U.S. higher education, groups of educators responded with recommendations to essentially go "back to the core"--a core that included media literacy. In isolated yet notable cases, serious reform efforts did involve educators from the field. Some of the most cogent arguments for communication educators to break from strict professionalism and participate more fully in the university have come from the discipline itself. Philosophical understanding must be primary, but stringent finances have a way of forcing educators to find common ground in pursuit of survival. Those who make their living studying media in a scientific and scholarly manner are the ones who should teach the general media education course. The course should encourage enrollment by juniors and seniors who already have a foundation in basic understandings of society. In addition to seminar and discussion formats, case studies could be used. The content of the course should include communication history/system/structures; communication theories and research currents; media literacy; and ethics/values. (Contains 33 references.) (RS)

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Impacting the Core:

The Case for a Media and Society Course in Liberal Arts Colleges

by

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INTRODUCTION

"We believe that journalism and mass communication are central to the functioning of contemporary society and that therefore providing an understanding of journalism and mass communication must be central to the mission of the university."

--- Everett Dennis (1987, 1)

The so called "Oregon Report" of the mid 1980's was a clarion call for journalism and mass communication educators in the United States. Although in need of updating, its findings remain a benchmark against which progress is measured as administrators and faculty address reform. But while change of any type is difficult, one of the central recommendations of this report remains largely unheeded as the field moves toward the next century. The Oregon researchers noted, "the craft and conceptual courses of the journalism/mass communication unit need to be connected in a very real way to the work of the rest of the university or college...it is important both to students in their overall education and to the future of the journalism/mass communication unit if it hopes to ever be seen as central to the university purposes and curriculum." (Dennis, 1987, 50)

This view was not entirely new, and echoed other moves towards reviving core curricula. A handful of communication educators took on the challenge in print and association presidents made pleas for the cause, but efforts to this point appear individualized and under-reported. The questions at hand are, why should communication educators be involved in general education and how can such change can be implemented? This paper will argue the case from three perspectives: society, higher education at large, and the communication discipline. The goal is to advance a practical, first step - a single course designed for general education that could be more easily

integrated into the core of smaller liberal arts colleges than in their university counterparts. This paper is for the individual educator at such institutions on a lonely crusade to impact students beyond the major. One course - one step - with important implications for the future of higher education and communication scholarship.

THE SOCIETAL CASE

Media Influence

On its face, society's argument for critical thinking regarding media is too obvious. People from all levels of American culture decry the influence of "the media" as if it is as an all-powerful, monolithic force. Politicians seek airtime in order to condemn the latest violent program. Parents complain about media values, while three televisions drain electricity in their homes. And a walk down the halls of most universities would reveal students and teachers with many opinions about what media do to society, even if they have little or no contact with the academic literature in the field.

A sample of recent surveys confirms trends dominating the latter twentieth century. North American teenagers watch more than 5 hours of television each day with a particular fondness for MTV and other music video programming. (Levere, 1996) One-third of children 10 to 16 in another survey say they often want to try things they see on TV. Commissioned by a children's advocacy group, the study also found 62% of the children believing that sex on television and in the movies influences young adults to engage in sex when they are too young. (Stepp, 1995) Television programmers who might hope some of those hours are spent on information content were challenged by another recent survey showing the number of people under age 30 watching network television news dropping by more than one-third in a 12 month period. Local news did not fare much better. (Mifflin, 1996)

College freshmen at U.S. four year colleges report television viewing lower than these national averages, but the numbers are still not ideal for the expectations of the academy. A 1994 survey by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA shows just over 30% of students watching at least six hours of television per week, with 7% watching more than 16 hours a week. In this high category, television viewing edged out studying, partying, student clubs and reading for pleasure. In fact, more than one fifth of the freshmen said they spent no time all year reading for pleasure. ("Freshman Survey...", 1995)

Television viewing statistics are nothing new, but new surveys are also finding the increasing role of the computer in the lives of youths. More than eighty percent of middle class teenagers around the world report using computers, the highest percentages coming from overseas. (Levere, 1996) A new study of Internet use finds those age 16 to 24 spending the most time online. Some four million young people say they are online at least five hours per week. Students also comprise 20% of the total online population, which is growing by the millions each year. ("Surfing popular..., 1996)

Media Literacy Movement

The response to such ever present media use statistics has come first from the public school sector, migrating from Europe to North America. Media education in Britain has a long history, stretching back over fifty years. Born in film studies and critical theory, media literacy during the 1970's contributed to a far reaching transformation of academic disciplines as diverse as English, art history and social theory. (Buckingham, 1990) In the 1990's, Canadian school systems introduced media literacy into the curriculum and U.S. educators considered the new field. One of the most significant endorsements came in 1994 from then Deputy Secretary of Education

Madeline Kunin. Speaking to a gathering of American and German educators, she declared schools, " have to teach critical viewing, listening, and thinking...Is the media a reflection of these times or does the media actually influence behavior?" She believed the answer was young people, "who can themselves block out, analyze, evaluate media." (Kunin, 1994) The Carnegie Council sounded similar concerns:

> "Though teenagers are constantly under a barrage of messages delivered by television, radio, and pop music, usually in isolation from adults, schools have hardly begun to teach them how to view and listen critically. Yet such a capacity ought to be a major component of life-skills education." (Hechinger, 1992).

The American response to these and other calls is tepid but growing. Media literacy remains housed in high school English departments, while advocates call for interdisciplinary attention reaching back to the elementary level. Cheerleaders for the cause also recognize that "for many educators, the idea of teaching about mass media and popular culture is foreign and for some anathema." (Considine, 1995, 40). The same might be said of academe. Armed with research degrees in sub-sub specialties, and a tradition revering the printed word, college faculties may at once condemn powerful media influence and then dismiss it as beyond the periphery of the educated mind. Unfortunately, society is not producing students who live in such an elite world.

THE LIBERAL ARTS CASE

The Tradition

The roots of the liberal arts core are as old as formalized education itself and it is unnecessary to review those currents here. Central to the often debated definition of "liberal arts" is the role of the student reading, interpreting and imbuing the most central of communication forms - words.

Even in non-Western cultures, the intensive and highly sophisticated study of a collection of revered texts did eventually become the focus of higher education. As Hellenistic culture gradually replaced rigid religious approaches to knowledge in the West, a literary education reigned supreme - attention to the great literature passed on through generations. Speech communicators are right to note the origins of their specialty in the rhetorical approach of the Greeks. Indeed, some historians mark the central battle in higher education for centuries began with a division between the Greek rhetoricians, claiming to impart wisdom through the art of speechmaking and persuasion, and the philosophers, using the dialectic to pursue truth. (Oakley, 1992) At its core, this traditional approach to education is rooted in thinking and communicating - preparing the student for service to the society at large.

The division between the Greeks gradually merged through the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation as a fixed body of knowledge, to be absorbed by every student. When it made its way to the American colonies, the Puritans who founded Harvard college found no reason to question the body of knowledge. Given their world view, this core was the "intellectual mirror of the divine mind." (Boyer and Kaplan, 1977, 20)

The major change for the United States came in the 19th century, as leading college presidents looked to the German university model, with distinguishing characteristics of marked specialization in curriculum, elective freedom for students and the faculty's commitment to research and training future scholars. The other major impact of the period was the Morrill Act of 1862, providing for land grant colleges. These schools were to furnish instruction in agriculture and the mechanic arts - in other words, service to the broader concerns of the general public. (Oakley, 1992) Harvard President Charles W. Eliot sounded the death knell for a mandatory,

classical curriculum in 1869 when he introduced a widened curriculum with minimal general requirements and a great deal of flexibility to choose what we now think of as the major. (Boyer and Kaplan, 1977)

The traditions of liberal arts left two critical artifacts in education of interest to the communication field. Most obvious is the idea that an educated person should be able to articulate ideas in spoken and written form. This is our traditional contribution to the academy and no new efforts should abandon such an important role. The other is more general yet not often addressed by the field - the tradition of social criticism. Colleges and universities are paradoxical organizations in society. They are sustained by society in one sense to be critical of it. High on the attributes of a liberally educated person is the ability to question what one hears and reads, challenge assumptions and ask difficult questions. (Mohrman, 1994) One wonders what the Greeks would make of mass media, and how a responsible critic should respond to it.

Back to the Core

As higher education in the U.S. diverged into new fields offering maximum choice to the student, it is easy to see how schools of journalism took their place on the professional side. Indeed, the origin of the field is traced back to Joseph Pulitzer's offer to endow a school of journalism at Columbia University. His goal was simply to make better journalists, better newspapers. (Rogers, 1994) The opportunity for communication educators to make a larger contribution to the core curriculum would be less of an issue now if not for more recent debates over the core itself. A series of notable reports in the 1980's came from such organizations as the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and individual criticism from Education Secretary William Bennett and Allan Bloom in

The Closing of the American Mind. All essentially made the same point: American undergraduate education has lost its coherence and integrity, and hence much of its value. The blame was often placed on the rapid expansion of career minded professional studies and the abandonment of integration across disciplines.(Marsh, 1988)

In the wake of such rampant criticism, groups of educators responded through symposia, joint papers and conferences. It is important to note that nestled within many of the recommendations to essentially go "back to the core" were concepts clearly taking communication study in a different direction. While reaffirming the traditional reading and writing skills taught by communication educators, the Association of American Colleges said:

> "Television is so much a part of our lives that it is foolish simply to deplore its weaknesses and its bad habits. Students need to learn how to look at and listen to their television sets critically, with as much focused intellectual energy as they are expected to apply to other experiences that call on their ability to listen and see intelligently."
>
> ("Integrity in the College Curriculum", 1985, 17)

Reformer Ernest Boyer laid out a case in the late 70's which he continued through many publications, essentially arguing for media literacy in the core:

> "All students should be exposed to a broad range of issues raised by our common existence in a world of messages. They should have an awareness of how languages develop, of the symbols we use, of the process of receiving and interpreting message... They should, for example, learn how to deal critically with advertising and propaganda; by looking at television news, they might elaborate a notion of 'tube literacy.'"
>
> (Boyer and Kaplan, 1977, 67)

Even with these calls which, arguably, imply the involvement of mass communication scholars, the evidence at the end of the reform period shows improvements in general education overall, but little advance in new areas for the communication field. In 1988, general education requirements in a sample of all four year institutions increased from 33.5 percent to nearly 40%. The study shows the applied communication skills of speaking and writing regaining strength, with 85 percent of schools requiring at least six credits, but there is no finding of additional core contributions in media studies or related fields. (Toombs et.al., 1991) A study of schools in the Central States Association in roughly the same period shows the standard public speaking course to be the most common contribution of the communication educators - required by 77% of institutions surveyed. Only generic survey courses in communication appear somewhat representative of what is advocated here, and those courses were only required in 12% of the schools. (Bjorklun, et.al., 1991)

Some Positive Directions

The need for media communication study did not remain implicit for everyone through the 80's. In isolated yet notable cases, serious reform did involve educators from our field. A specific effort to integrate the contributions of professional schools to general education took place in an experiment at Syracuse University. Faculty met to redevelop nine Honors courses, eventually expanding them to 12. The collaborative curriculum included the course "Social and Cultural Issues in Public Communications", taught by the professionally oriented Public Communication College, and "Seeing, Reading and Interpretation", taught by the Departments of English and School of Art with attention to visual imagery. (Marsh, 1988) In the former, journalism professor Cleve Matthews found even such familiar concepts as "objectivity" took on different

understandings when applied across disciplines with different students. The result benefitted both the general honors students, and those already majoring in the Public Communication college:

> "By examining the ways various disciplines validate the truth of the bodies of knowledge they build, students may avoid an objectivity trap that threatens the professions... Students in the professional schools may thus encounter those basic criteria of objectivity more readily in their liberal arts courses than in the professional courses that emphasize practice." (Matthews, 1988, 84)

Robert Blanchard and William Christ, who are among the leading communication scholars beating the drum for more contribution to the core, actually implemented many of their ideas at Trinity University in Texas. By participating in reform efforts of the whole core of the institution, they were able to play a major role in adding communication studies to the mix. Trinity organized its curriculum around eight understandings, the last of which was "Understanding Major Institutional Systems." The description reads:

> "...the evolution, functions, and human consequences of major and complex structures such as law, banking and finance, engineering, communication, or medical care. The intent of this requirement is to view an institutional system in its broadest context, employing perspectives from both liberal and professional studies."
>
> (Christ and Blanchard, 1988, 62)

Their specific response to this "Eighth Understanding" is a communication and technology course elective that fulfills the requirement for interested students, without overloading Trinity's Communication Department with servicing a core course for 100% of the student body.

Finally, in a recent symposium on liberal education there are hopeful signs the explosion of

information technology will invite the involvement of communication educators who understand the context of these developments. Administrators from eighty liberal arts colleges gathered to consider directions for the 21st century. In an article concerning computer literacy, librarian Peter Lyman goes beyond mere machines to place computers at the center of a communication revolution changing the very roots of the liberal arts:

> "In a society in which images and information have the prestige of being real and true, can literacy be said to exist as a critical skill if it does not include the reading of images? Consider the relative authority of television and newspapers in the construction of public opinion and the election of political leaders, the authority of advertisements and information in the construction of economic life, and the authority of cinema or television and novels in cultural life. Are these forms of entertainment, or the social realms, of fundamental importance to liberal education?...Ultimately it is not the computer that liberal education must come to terms with, it is information, the knowledge made by the computer, the work of art constructed by computers, that tacitly makes the claim to be real and thereby true." (Lyman, 1996, 118)

The response of the participants included language in the conference document recognizing, "the setting of our education enterprise: the explosion of knowledge, the proliferation of subject matter, and the development of new information technologies." ("Conference Statement..", 1996, 158)

Even if many academics steeped in the liberal arts tradition are slow to recognize and appreciate the standing of the communication discipline, the statements and ideas of both the tradition and its most recent champions argue for more attention to understanding media. It is not

so much the liberal arts that have changed, because as an abstract notion "liberal arts" is more a way of educating than a prescribed set of courses. Educating the young person to play an informed role in society is deeply embedded in the liberal tradition. But the context of modern society has changed. Just as educators of the past engaged society through its writings, the curriculum of this age must encounter the electronic world: sights, sounds, and cyber. While it seems clear many reformers are calling for new attention to this world, it is less certain if communication educators will be the ones to answer the call.

THE CASE FROM THE COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINE

A Voice in Academe

Some of the most cogent arguments for communication educators to break from strict professionalism and participate more fully in the university have come from discipline itself. Willard G. ("Daddy") Bleyer, who founded the journalism program at Wisconsin and whose curriculum still has influence today, pioneered in promoting journalism as a legitimate discipline. Bleyer emphasized teaching journalism as social science, believing it could not survive in research universities without academic respectability. (Rogers, 1994) Likewise, Wilbur Schramm's blueprint for a journalism school at Iowa communicated a broader vision to the university president:

> " I should like to see the kind of School of Journalism that would be not as weak as itself, but as strong as the university...a School that would be in the very heart of the university, which would begin with the assumption that the students it wants to produce will be the students in the whole university best equipped to understand and talk about the world they live in." (Cartier, 1988, 246)

Through the years and especially the last two decades, other leaders in the field have recognized one way to be at the "heart of the university" is to teach students beyond the narrow realm of the communication major. In his "Plea for the University Tradition" in 1978, Association for Education in Journalism President James Carey said journalism and mass communication are, like most other professional programs, left out of the task of liberal education because they have become anti-intellectual - not given to systematic analysis and criticism:

> "...the general absence of the professions from general education and their wrong-headed inclusion when they are represented derives from the principal tenet of professionalism: because we have doctors, lawyers, journalists we need know nothing substantial about law, medicine and politics; the professionals will do our knowing for us. And this argument ignores the fact that courses in professional schools are often devoid, in general, of intellectual content and often deliberately stifle thought." (Carey, 1978, 852)

Carey's admonition was for scholars to "reassert the university tradition," recognizing the task of higher education is not job training but to restore the idea of the public and public life.

More recently, ICA president Ellen Wartella urged colleagues to consider their role in the university and society at large, as critical public policy depends on informed voices about media:

> "For if we in communication do not address the pressing public questions about communication and the quality of life, the character of public discourse, the uses of communication for combating public health problems and other threats to the population, the social impact of new technologies, the ways to develop democratic forms of communications in societies struggling out of their recent histories, and the various consequences of global communications, we are misreading the current public interest in

communication and we are shirking our responsibilities. If we do not take up these questions, moreover, other disciplines will, displacing communication further into a position of irrelevance." (Wartella, 1993, 59)

Pleas from association presidents and other leaders in the discipline do not, by themselves, make the case. But it is worthy to see a long line of evolution in communication education struggling with dual role of professional skills and liberal education. The idea that general education remains an evident, if not applied, objective of the field is reflected in the AEJMC's most recent curriculum task force report. Two of five goals of media education, determined by the group, involve the general population of students. In their list, number two is "to educate non-majors about the role of media in society," and number four is, "to prepare liberally educated graduates to become media analysts and critics." ("Responding to the Challenge..., 1996) While such general understandings and philosophical arguments remain consistent, there is still little evidence of implementation.

Survival in the System

Although few of us want to argue grand curricular issues for simple economic survival, the reality is no educator can ever escape the tyranny of the budget. The Oregon Report noted in 1987 that ours was a field, "...grossly underfunded, even when compared with other university departments, schools and colleges. Journalism/mass communication units have large, sometimes massive, enrollments and tiny, overworked faculty." (Dennis, 1987, 1) Although such dismal reports were not always the norm through the 90's, the reality of basing curriculum entirely on enrollment within the field creates a dependence on what Blanchard and Christ (1993) call the "corn-hog" cycle. Using economic theory, more popular majors create more graduates which

lowers starting wages in the field and, eventually, fewer people seek the major. They argue the effect is compounded in communication education by increasing sub-specialties within the discipline which have fragmented and sapped already limited resources. If or when overall communication enrollments decline again, what will happen in such highly fragmented departments? They believe some administrators would jump at the chance to make substantial budget reductions.

Another AEJMC President, Tony Atwater, noted just those kinds of cutbacks in the early 90's, that drastically reorganized or eliminated "numerous programs," and recommended urgent attention:

> "...it would be foolhardy to wait and see if a trend develops before taking preemptive steps to strengthen our academic standing...The journalism/mass communication academy is a unique and shining example of an interdisciplinary area of study. Our field also provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate an intellectually powerful 'contextual dialogue' between professional education and liberal arts...our future viability rests upon our becoming a more active and academically relevant member of that 'academic community.'" (Atwater, 1993, 74-75)

Philosophical understanding must be primary, but stringent finances have a way of forcing us to find common ground in pursuit of survival.

The Maturity of the Discipline

Finally, there is an effective argument that contribution to the general core of education is a logical step for an emerging discipline. Since the end of World War II, which most in our field agree is the start of formal communication research and study, this field has emerged as an

academic enterprise not merely training the next generation of communication professionals, but also contributing to knowledge itself. By the early 1990's, an estimated 1,500 schools or departments of communication existed in the United States. (Elmore, 1990) The field of communication study has been one of the fastest growing academic units on U.S. university campuses for the past several decades. (Rogers, 1994) And perhaps more importantly to the academy, these units are increasingly being taught by scholars holding the Ph.D. from established research universities.

The thrust of this paper has been to argue the case for general media education from the needs of society, liberal arts and the communication field. If that case is clear from all three realms, then the central question is, Who should teach it? This argument suggests it should be those who have made their living studying media in a scientific and scholarly manner. The result of letting some other discipline step up to the plate is uncertain at best.

In an anecdotal account, an American studies and history instructor details experiences teaching a "television and American culture" course to undergraduates. Her comments show a misunderstanding of both media and media education:

> "My education as a professional student of American culture probably resembles that of many other scholars. I have been taught to look past cultural appearances, to uncover partially veiled power relationships, and to try to find a place to stand outside the workings of our daily lives to get a better perspective on how we live them." (Cayton, 1994, A52)

Although her comments betray a critical studies perspectives, what is more instructive in the account is what she does not say. Nowhere in the article does she mention seeking out communication scholars for help in the instruction or even reading in the literature of

communication research. And the frustration her students felt with constantly critiquing television lead to a pedagogical approach where students:

> "began to balance what we had read about television with (their) own research. Our ideas were informed by everything we had read, seen, and talked about, but this time we began with the assumption that other people's analyses weren't the final word. We, too, could design projects that would tell us what we needed to know and help us to understand the impact of television on our culture." (Cayton, 1994, A52)

While her creative learning approach is commendable on its face, the response of communication science should be, "Wait a minute...everything is not subject to opinion. There are some things we do know about media, because we have studied them rigorously, repeatedly and reliably!" What else may be missing from this class? What of the economic structures, or historical foundations that lead media to its present state? What of the market and legal forces that create media messages? What of the role of audience in constructing effects? These are questions our field has been asking for some time now. It is likely many college students have studied media in some form, and never heard much about the answers we have found.

In short, when we leave the important task of media understanding completely in the hands of another discipline, the opinion leaders of our culture, or the students, we abandon our responsibility to our society and ourselves. The perspectives from other schools of thought are valid, but we are the closest thing our institutions have to an expert in residence. Most of us have modest professional experience, so we understand media from the inside and know that much of the criticism at large simply misses the point. An increasing majority of us also hold research degrees, which carry with them a body of knowledge mastered and original contributions to

scholarship. It is our responsibility, then, to make the case on each campus for the role we will play in the broader educational community. If we do not, communication study, as we know it, will continue to be irrelevant in many of the institutions we serve.

SOME COURSE SUGGESTIONS

Approach

At the outset, this paper was concerned with synthesizing arguments for general media education and for offering a practical, first step to answering many of the calls for such efforts that have circulated in recent years. The integration of communication into general core studies is too broad and important to come down to simply adding a course, but others cited here have already addressed the big picture. The media and society course is the first step the individual communication faculty member can address. As proposed, this course should be introduced as either a core course, or a core option. The latter is more preferable for two reasons. Schools with a long tradition of liberal arts may view the core as sacrosanct. There may be more room in the general curriculum for a core option, such as suggested by Blanchard and Christ (1993) in their "understanding eight." This course would be an option within a broader, more abstract core goal. The other reason is quite pragmatic. A core class that every student has to take must be serviced by the department or college. Any veteran instructor of basic speech will attest to the sheer volume of students that must be herded through the classes in a given semester. This is the curse and blessing for many departments because they offer something of tremendous value to the institution but must staff many sections through adjuncts and regular faculty. A media study option must be serviced, and as argued here, taught by faculty holding the Ph.D. But an option is more manageable than a requirement.

Format

The core option should be level 300 or higher, encouraging enrollment by juniors or seniors who already have a foundation in basic understandings of society. Smaller class sizes are ideal, allowing for more discussion, group projects and interactive learning. In some institutions, this may be impossible. Schools with core "capstone" requirements at the junior and senior level do frequently manage such classes in large, lecture type formats. Experience and research support the idea that large classes can be used for critical thinking, if the instructor aggressively seeks to stimulate active learning. (McKeachie, 1994) Since most of the students will have broad exposure to media, and many will presume to be "armchair experts," this class content may work better in large settings than many of the other general, lower division, knowledge-based courses that are frequently taught in large sections.

In addition to seminar and discussion formats, case studies could be used either in the class or in smaller group reports as a way to apply concepts to real life scenarios. The focus in both discussion and research assignments should be on cross-disciplinary integration. Students should be encouraged to form connections between their majors, their prior general learning, and the media and society content. For example, a major research paper could be assigned asking the student to view a media issue through their chosen profession. How has the media portrayed nurses? How do business concerns impact news coverage? Can television be used effectively in the classroom? These three majors: nursing, business, and education, are all common to most campuses and it is likely mass media touches these and every other discipline represented.

Linkages should also be forged through team or guest teaching. When discussing media impact on the political process, the political scientists on campus should be invited to join in the

dialogue. Visiting faculty might not even need to "lecture," but rather participate in issue driven panels, much like the format of professional conferences. Certain faculty may have research expertise in content areas that can be included. The nature of a media and society course is such that portions of its design should be flexible.

Content

The most difficult part of such a course will be deciding what to teach. All of these areas should have instructive feet planted in two perspectives - the knowledge of the past for an understanding of the future. The students of today are exposed to more media messages than any generation previously, and they are likely aware of the technological options and information overload to come. In teaching the best of what communication scholarship has learned, we should always look forward to the world these students will face and consider new technologies across each dimension. The following are suggested as major conceptual areas, with great room for refinement:

1. Communication History/System/Structures - Rather than a distinct unit on the schedule, history, systems and structures should be woven throughout the topic areas with attention to those ideas most relevant to society as a whole. There are intricacies and anecdotes commonly taught in mass communication survey classes which have little bearing or interest for the general student. It is important, for example, to know how the newspaper wars of the late 1800's shaped journalism and concepts of sensationalism today. It is not as important for the students to know the life stories of Pulitzer and Hearst.
2. Communication Theories and Research Currents - A major goal of this course should

be to acquaint the general student with the findings of communication research/science over the last 50 years. Of particular importance are those theories and findings which impact social policy, governmental decisions and personal well being. Those theories and findings which have stood up over time in the field should be communicated in lay terms. These might include: agenda setting, persuasion, cultivation, violence and television and diffusion of innovation.

3. Media Literacy - This should not be viewed as a pure media literacy class, with total emphasis on interpretation and criticism of media messages. But some elements of those skills should be addressed with the fundamental objective of creating good media consumers. The notions of symbols, imagery, textual cues and other interpretation skills should be integrated across the semester.
4. Ethics/Values - It is difficult to address notions of values in a general curriculum because of relativistic perspectives and professional differences. The emphasis here should be on ethical decisions for the common good of society. What is the greater good or evil in a media message? How do media serve the common good or how do they work against it? The general student needs a broader understanding to go beyond seeing media as "just a movie" or "just television," yet balance that criticism with a recognition of how media producers make ethical decisions and the various factors that shape those decisions. A universal right or wrong is not the goal here. But an informed mind to decide what is right or wrong on the basis of clear evidence is a most important task.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the pursuit of higher learning in the United States has evolved to the point where new perspectives and new issues must be addressed. Change is never an easy thing in higher education, where committees, peer review and tenure often synergize to promote the status quo. The arguments outlined here are focused on the individual scholar, the champion of his or her discipline often toiling in a small department with relative obscurity. It is a clarion call for those individuals who may be outside the fortress of general education to scale the wall, fight the fight and change the future. While it will be difficult, many leaders in communication education have made clear this direction is in the best philosophical, if not economic, interest of our field and education at large. Some encouragement for the battle is found in historian Bruce Kimball's study of the liberal tradition. Far from being a canon of classics, he asserts the liberal arts are most clearly characterized by change:

> "...the tradition of liberal education is not uniform and continuous but full of variety, discontinuity, and innovation. It has been and is a conflicted tradition...the ways of the insider and the outsider are often not as easily identified as those envisioning liberal education for the twenty-first century might be led to assume." (Kimball, 1996, 29)

Communication educators have been the outsiders for too long, even as their field of study has matured and become central to understanding modern society. The opportunity is before us and the future is at stake.

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